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The Most Humiliating Moment of My Life

Around this time last December, my team and I were on an offsite in Boulder, Colorado. Most of our team worked remotely, so it was a gift any time we could all be together.

“Bring your kids! Bring your spouse! Bring your joy!”

The anticipation had been growing for weeks. Boulder at Christmas time?! There was something about the romance of it all that made you want to be still amidst the craziness of Christmas.

A few meetings, unfinished documents and holiday lattes later, finally we found ourselves on our way to the dinner we had all been waiting for.

“Get dressed up! Get babysitters for the kids! We’re goin’ big!”

We piled into cars and made our way to one of the classiest restaurants I’d ever been in. As we made our way inside, a beautiful, yet painful reality started to sink in: All of my teammates were married.

Of course this wasn’t anything new. They were some of my best friends! But in the midst of playing with all their kids and the chaos of the weekend, I had forgotten this little difference in vocation.

I remember walking into the restaurant thinking, *Oh, yeah! Marriage! Love that. I suppose I’ll be the only single one here tonight. That’s never really happened to me...But I’ll be fine. This is going to be beautiful! As long as nothing crazy happens...I’ll be fine.*

As we all found our seats, more thoughts started to tip-toe in my head: *Wow, my teammates are amazing! Their spouses are amazing! Hmm. Spouses. They are really choosing each other. Wow. They’re chosen. They chose each other, imperfections and all. I wonder what that feels like to be chosen....*

I could feel myself starting to isolate. **There I was at a table full of some of the most important people in my life — and I was secretly struggling.**

I went on with the meal, fighting the lies like it was my JOB. I was proud of myself for holding it together so well! But then, something happened. A plot twist, if you will.

Part of the excitement of this dinner was our long-awaited Secret Santa reveal. We went around the table guessing who had us and laughing at how off we were. One by one my teammates all received their gifts. And then it came to the last person: me.

“Hmmm. Zach? Is it you?”

“Nope.”

“Josh!”

“Nope.”

“...”

We all slowly came to the realization: I had been forgotten in the confusion of drawing names. “Oh no! We forgot Emily!” It PAINED me to watch as their faces turned to me in pity, one by one. “Oh, you guys! I’m fine! It’s an honest mistake! I’m fine!” I said, turning on my theatre major and laughing to hide my desire to run in literally any direction.

But this little, insignificant mistake opened a can of worms I had been holding tightly shut for so long. And I can now say with confidence that the explosion that was about to take place was my gift from God.

Attempting to make light of the situation, I turned to a teammate and went on, “Don’t worry! I’m also the only one here without a spouse!”

I laughed. **And then I cried.**

All I wanted to do was run. And I tried; I raced to the restroom to cover up my tears, but it was too late. A few of my teammates followed me, asked me questions, listened to me — and then they let me cry.

My teammates were as amazing as I said they were. **In some way or another, in their own lives, they understood the ache.** Financial struggles, miscarriage, cancer, infertility: They knew the weight of the cross.

I kept crying. Even back at the table, the tears wouldn’t stop. It was one of the most humiliating nights of my entire life — and one of the most profound. Despite my seemingly insignificant pain, Jesus wouldn’t let me run away. My teammates wouldn’t let me run away. **And while our crosses don’t become any less heavy, Christ — and the people He places in our lives — can help us carry the weight.**

This January, I'm going to be one of the emcees at SLS18, our FOCUS leadership conference in Chicago. And I don't think I can put into words how humbled I am by this opportunity. We've been praying; we've been fasting; we've been posting pics and unveiling giveaways in hopes that those on the fence will consider attending.

I was asked to write this blog months ago, but I avoided it because my heart wasn't quite sure what to tell you. Not until today, when this story came back to me in prayer.

I don't think I had ever felt as insignificant or as small as I did that night in Boulder. For a split second, I felt completely and utterly alone. **But I am filled with gratitude that I had friends that night who wouldn't let me run. I had friends who weren't afraid to remind me that I was never alone.**

Who are the people sitting at your table? Who are the ones that need to be reminded of this truth? And are you equipped to tell them?

I'm inviting you to come to [SLS18](#) for those people and for those who are sitting at tables with no one to stop them from running.

We are meant to evangelize, and to evangelize means to share that we are not alone. At [SLS18](#), we will be learning how to enter into the conversations at our own tables. We will be learning how to best share our story and the story of our Lord. We will teach you how to give life back to your parish and how to love those secretly struggling. And what's going to change our culture is the fact that we are going to teach you how to teach others to do the same.

This next Christmas offsite, I've been put in charge of the Secret Santa. We laugh about it now, but it's still so easy for me to remember my pull to run.

I can only imagine how many are thinking about running right now, today. Running from the Church they think is dying. Running from their hard marriages. Running right out of their own lives.

Come to [SLS18](#) and learn how to run after the people sitting at your table.

Come to [SLS18](#) and learn how to share that the gift God wants to give us is greater than anything a Secret Santa has to offer.

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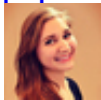
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